THE CHANGING SOUTH

By FRANK E. SMITH

"COTTON is going West, cattle are coming East, Negroes are going North, and Yankees are coming South." This popular quip is more fact than fantasy, and it briefly describes a great many of the changes through which the South is passing in these middle years of the twentieth century.

Today California would be second only to Texas as a cotton-producing state except for the artificial restraint of acreage controls. New Mexico and Arizona are important parts of the cotton belt. Cotton is still the major Southern agricultural commodity, but it is no longer king. The shift of cotton production to the Western states has come at the same time the old cotton-producing states have become major cattle producers. Texas is symbolic of the shift. Old-South east Texas is rapidly becoming cattle country, displacing cotton as the keystone of its agricultural economy. At the same time the west Texas country, once considered usable only as part of the western cattle range, has become the largest cotton-producing area of the state, thanks to irrigation and mechanized cultivation and harvesting.

The shift from cotton to cattle is not exchange of one one-crop economy for another, but it is symbolic of a healthy diversification of Southern agriculture. There is still much to be accomplished toward diversification, but it has today become an accepted goal throughout the South. Part of the diversification achievements can be attributed to the enforced limitations upon cotton plantings at various periods during the operation of the government price support program. At some future date hindsight may show the elimination of the

one-crop system to have been one of the major accomplishments of the restricted production program.

"Negroes going North and Yankees coming South" is the story of both economic and political change. When the mechanical cotton picker first appeared on the scene, there were fearful cries about the human misery that would result from the displacement of agricultural labor in the South. Actually, the cotton picker and the less dramatic tractor have barely been able to keep up with the shortage of labor caused by migration to Southern cities and other parts of the country. This migration reached its greatest peak during World War II, but has continued throughout the postwar years, with only brief setbacks during periods of economic recession.

Industrialization has come to the South largely from the North. Insufficient local capital and know-how had handicapped industrialization of the South, and a vast part of the industrial development which has come since World War II is expansion of industries already established in other parts of the country. Instead of merely opening branch plants, many of these industries are now shifting their chief production to the South.

"Yankees in the South" is also a symbol of political change. The Republican party gained successes in 1952 which are likely to be less tenuous than those of 1928, even though most Southern states are still many years away from two-party status. Republican success has its greatest air of permanence where there is substantial industrial development, where there are the largest concentrations of population from the North.

The South is changing, but change is not new to the region. The changes have been underway since the failure of the bloody struggle to resist the great economic and social revolution that became imminent immediately preceding the Civil War. All change throughout the ninety years since the War has been met with stubborn resistance, but the change has inexorably come.

For twenty-five years after the failure of its war for in-

dependence the South struggled through a period of sometimes still-violent mutation, attempting to establish economic and political order out of the chaos which existed at the conclusion of the War. Reconstruction for the native whites was an effort to re-establish domination in political and economic affairs. They succeeded in gaining political control at home, with some semblance of the re-establishment of the plantation economy. But the poverty-stricken region lacked the capital or the credit to give sound foundation to its economy, and the result was a colonial status which was often extended into unknowing political control, in both Washington and the state capitals. The excesses of the Reconstruction struggle have also left their mark on the region as it has sought to adjust itself to each new period of American history, down to the present.

Reconstruction established a political pattern for the South, but it did not control the economic goals to be sought by the new political order. The Southern agricultural economy was a fertile ground for the new idea that political action could eliminate some of the abundant agricultural poverty. The Populist movement was an early symbol of the protest, but the Populists as such rarely gained power because of the fear that such division might restore political power to the black man. The Democrats in the South largely defeated the Populists by absorbing them and their program. At the national level this absorption of Populism was reflected in the enthusiastic support which William Jennings Bryan received in the South, and in the same enthusiasm for Woodrow Wilson's new freedom, both at the polls and from Southerners in the Congress. At the state level, practically every state named governors dedicated to economic and social reform during the period. The educational program set in motion by North Carolina's Governor Aycock just after the turn of the century is perhaps the best known and the most successful.

By any standard the accomplishments of the period were

very limited, but the chief reason was the basic poverty that had existed since the Civil War turned the economy of the region upside down.

World War I gave most of the South its first taste of the industrialization that some of its leading citizens had been preaching for many years in the fashion of Henry Grady. The taste was good, and for ten years after the war industrial development was the theme of Southern business and political life. New industries came at a greater rate than ever before, but the rate of industrial expansion was still not as great as that of the country as a whole during the same period.

Except for the dollar cotton boom of 1919 and 1920, Southern agriculture was not a partner in the prosperity of the 1920's. The agricultural depression was a forerunner of the Great Depression, which ground its heel into the South more deeply than any part of the country.

The New Deal brought for the first time an opportunity to solve, through Federal intervention, some of the economic problems which Federal intervention had helped create seventy years before. The South eagerly supported all facets of the New Deal which offered the spending of Federal money in the South. Consciously or not, there was a realization that lack of money was the basic Southern problem. Conservative forces shied away from some of the Roosevelt reform program, but there was no opportunity for effective resistance until World War II had brought a new kind of prosperity to much of the South. WPA and PWA and similar programs brought a relatively higher standard of living to much of the South than had been enjoyed for generations.

The most important part of the New Deal as far as the South was concerned was the farm program. The price support program for the first time offered both an increase in farm income and some assurance of stability. The related agricultural programs of rural electrification, soil conservation and resource development, and expanded opportunity

for farm ownership were also popular. Southern agriculture is now wedded to these or similar programs for years yet to come. The Southern farmer accepts the fact that farm prices are made in Washington, and he keeps a sharp eye in that direction.

World War II had vastly more influence upon the South than the obvious effect of heavy wartime spending. The catalytic force of that experience on the country as a whole has been doubly felt in the economic, social, and political life of the South. It is the impetus behind the accelerated change in the South today. Much of the change is economic progress offering men higher standards of living and better ways of life. Much of it is cultural and social change, often uncomprehended and often unwanted and resisted. Most of the change is as inevitable as the turn of the pages of history; part of it is a result of the peculiarly vast depth of need in the South.

The industrial expansion in the United States necessary to meet the needs of World War II was enlarged upon by the military mobilization program of the Korean War, built upon a relatively unrestricted civilian prosperity. This proof of the capacity of the American economy has revolutionized most thinking about peaceful goals for the economy. Today a President can speak of an immediate goal of $500 billion annual income for the country and receive cheers instead of jeers from his fellow conservative Republicans.

The South has profited proportionately more than any other section from this economic expansion. During the fifteen-year period which began with the outbreak of World War II in 1939, business volume in the South increased by 500 per cent, farm income by 300 per cent, and manufacturing output by 500 per cent. Perhaps the most satisfactory measure of progress was the increase in per capita income from $381 to $1,305.

Industrial and commercial expansion have come to the South primarily because of the generally increased capacity

of the country as a whole. Other factors have contributed to out-sized expansion. Firms faced with the necessity of costly rehabilitation of plants and machinery have determined that it was better business to build new sites where there were better climate, lower taxes, and less likelihood of labor difficulties. Wage differentials have been the decisive factor with some marginal industries, and others have come South through the combination of promotion and incentives offered by state governments with fine disregard of "free enterprise" dogma. Tax exemptions and free or cheap plant use have been chief among the incentives. Low-cost power has been a major contribution, although, contrary to widespread notions, all but a small fraction of the new generating capacity in the area has been supplied by private utilities.

The greater part of the industrial growth in the South is built upon a solid foundation which should survive all but major dislocations in the economy of the country. There is considerable marginal industry that has already shown its nature in periods of recession during the past two years, but even those communities which have felt the blow of the shutdown factory have generally reflected that the period of employment and paychecks was better than the complete void in existence before any plant operated.

Other economic influences are likely to affect wage differentials as new industrial developments survive the experimental stage. Competition for labor and unionization will become more important factors that will eventually make wages responsive to industrial and national rather than regional influences. At the same time the Southern advantages of climate, comparatively more efficient plant and equipment, and labor supply will become a bigger part of the picture.

There is good reason to believe economic expansion of the South will continue at the same rate during the next fifteen years. This will mean that many of the country's industries will be centered in the region, especially those using chemical and agricultural commodities as raw materials. There may

be as many as a dozen cities in the neighborhood of the million mark in population. Service industries will continue to mushroom in line with the improvement in the per capita income of the people.

Greater individual income is bringing a higher standard of living to the people of the South, through the normal operation of the demand and supply system. There is better living also because all levels of government are more active in helping to provide it. One concise example is the experience of Mississippi in the eight years since the Hill-Burton hospital construction program first went into effect. In that time, while the state's population was remaining static, the patient days of service rendered by general hospitals in the state increased by 65 per cent. It is simply the result of hospital beds becoming available for the great mass of the people for the first time.

New development may see a larger home ownership and control of expanding business. Because of lack of capital and know-how, both money and management have been largely imported. Some of the state governments which have entered freely into industrial promotion have begun to see the possibilities of state action to channel local capital into new business. There has been even more active participation of local capital on its own initiative simply because local money is present for the first time. At the management-operative level, higher educational standards all down the line are offering greater opportunities for competent personnel for Southern business and industry.

Thanks to the impetus of an economic expansion completely interwoven with both the economy and the culture of the United States as a whole, the South may be about to begin the most far-reaching change it has experienced since the War Between the States. The region may be entering completely the mainstream of American life after a century of movement among the eddies and shallows and drifting outside the turbulence.

In 1865 a young Federal officer inspected a Mississippi plantation home, and commented:

> . . . The literature of the family library was quite ancient. Dryden, Scott, Shakespeare, Pope, Swift, Byron, and Johnson were to be found there. Also Voltaire and Paine, Adams, Madison and Jefferson were there; but Calhoun, Webster, Clay and Benton appeared to be the favorites. . . . Of course, I looked in vain for a scrap from such advanced thinkers as Gerrit Smith, Garrison, Phillips, Sumner, Lowell or Whittier, or even Seward or Emerson.

Much of the criticism of the cultural backwardness of the South through the years has had more or less this same flavor, but even the most violent Southern partisans have to accept the fact that the region produced only Edgar Allan Poe as a major literary figure until well into the twentieth century. After Jefferson and Madison there were no national philosophers, although Calhoun deserves rank as a student and philosopher of government whose theories have profoundly influenced the destiny of our country.

The acid pen of H. L. Mencken was also dipped into the exaggeration traditional of critics of the South when he described the region as a cultural Sahara in 1920. Mr. Mencken was probably right when he said that "in all that Gargantuan paradise of the fourth-rate, there is not a single picture gallery worth going into, or a single orchestra capable of playing the nine symphonies of Beethoven, or a single opera house, or a single theater devoted to decent plays." He did not point out that all of these accoutrements of culture require ample financial support, and that money was not present and had not been for some time. Today, with money considerably more free, the void described has been filled. Even before prosperity and tax laws began to encourage the endowment of cultural enterprises in the South, state and local governments were taking action in the field, by contrast with some less conservative parts of the country. A small but effective

example is the state-endowed Barter Theater at Abingdon, Virginia.

In the field of higher education, Southern universities are not likely ever to reach a position comparable with the great endowed institutions like Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Princeton, and Chicago. There are limits in this field that might not be met by even the fabled Texas millionaires. Southern state universities, however, can be compared with almost any group of state schools over the country. When the limited resources available to support these schools are taken into consideration, the comparison usually can be favorable.

At the same time that Mr. Mencken complained, in 1920, of the lack of opera houses in the South, he said that except for James Branch Cabell ". . . you will not find a single Southern prose writer who can actually write. . . ." Glossing over the possibility of an argument about Cabell, even as Mencken was writing, Southerners such as William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, and Ellen Glasgow were writing the works that have made the statement ridiculous.

During this post-Mencken period, American literature has gone through a cycle of the Southern novel in a manner not far-removed from the cycle of the proletarian novel and the Freudian novel. The most able Southern writers, however, are no longer classified as "Southern" writers. Each new artist may be compared with other Southern writers, but they are no longer discarded to a special limbo because of that fact. It will never be possible to evaluate a writer like Faulkner without an understanding of the distinctive Southern influences in which he lived and of which he wrote, but it is possible to consider him and others as creative artists, instead of as freaks escaped from the swampland.

There is some truth in the quip that book sales are so low in Mississippi (or substitute any other Southern state) because the people are so busy writing books they don't have time to read them. Actually, the sales record has been low because the income figure has also been low, and with that

less stress upon the educational and environmental influences which encourage book readers. The continued economic development and expansion is certain to bring changes in the cultural indices of book sales and magazine subscriptions. The creative artist in the South today finds as much encouragement as anywhere in the country, probably more than in most areas. Other than the still important fact that the economic level is still below the national average, there are certainly no unfavorable factors.

Political changes which have come to the South during the past decade are sometimes more apparent than real. The one big change is the increasing respectability of the Republican party. This relatively favorable atmosphere for Republicans, as well as for some of those who maintain the Democratic label but oppose all national Democratic policy, is likely to continue as long as economic conditions remain generally prosperous. Although much of the Republican success in 1928 in carrying several Southern states for Herbert Hoover is today attributed to the religious and prohibition issues injected into the campaign, it is significant that the times were relatively prosperous. As mentioned earlier, appreciable opposition to Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal did not make material headway in the South until wartime prosperity had eased some of the depression pangs.

In 1952 the personal popularity of President Eisenhower and the generally unfavorable reaction to the Democratic administration of President Truman were the major factors in Republican success in the South. This success also came during a period of general prosperity, but the chief cause of the dissatisfaction with President Truman was the civil rights program which the President and the national Democratic party had supported. Eisenhower supporters claimed a position satisfactory to the South on this issue. The Eisenhower administrative actions in the field of civil rights and racial matters generally have very likely neutralized or eliminated the civil rights issue from future Republican and Democratic

conflict in the South. With Republicans no longer able to claim anti-civil rights records, they are unlikely to achieve any spectacular results for years still to come. The 1956 election will show a decline in Republican presidential strength in the South, no matter who the party nominees. If economic conditions are not favorable in the election year, the Republican decline could be spectacular.

Bitter factional fights within the Democratic party will continue to be the rule instead of the exception in the Southern states. The causes will continue to vary from factionalisms and personalities to standard "liberal versus conservative." If the history of the first half of the twentieth century can be used as a guide, some of the political leaders who take the most extreme stands on racial issues will also be radical on economic matters. This will be in the tradition of Vardaman, Jim Watson, and Bilbo.

The South has gained an undeserved reputation over the years as a producer of demagogues and buffoons among its political leaders. Certainly the region has given prominence to a fair share of politicians who fit this description, but in no greater proportion than other parts of the country. Perhaps the reputation was built up because all other sections could self-righteously disclaim "bigotry" thanks to the absence of a racial factor in state politics. Recent developments indicate this atmosphere may be changing.

Through the recent past Southern representation in the Congress has made significant contributions to governmental policy which appear sound and far-sighted from the present vantage point of hindsight. Although major New Deal economic reforms were enacted with overwhelming Southern support, it was Southern opposition which halted the Supreme Court packing plan. Perhaps other motivations than preservation of traditional safeguards for constitutional liberty entered into the historic court fight. The net effect, however, was to strengthen the tradition of the constitutional system. Southern influence in the more recent Congressional

controversies involving investigative power and abuses has been on the side of adequate safeguards to protect the individual rights of citizens and the proper division of powers within the government. Few Southerners have been in the forefront of agitation around these issues, but the eventual weight of Southern influence has been the deciding factor in each step toward the elimination of abuses.

At that critical period when it appeared the United States was about to abandon the draft of soldiers just a few weeks before American entrance into World War II, it was a solid block of Southern votes which prevented the senseless and dangerous confusion that would have resulted. Southern Congressmen were generally ahead of the field in awakening to the dangers of isolation prior to World War II, just as they had led the fight in trying to achieve Woodrow Wilson's goal of membership in the League of Nations. Today Southerners have the chief responsibility for the legislative defense of the policies of an internationally-minded Republican president, at a time when his own party cannot furnish the leadership to implement his program through the Congress.

In recent years the South has felt a relatively sharp increase in isolationist sentiment, even though such thinking is still in the overall minority. In part this has been due to the growing influence of protectionist elements within the new industrial and agricultural development. The chief cause has probably been the influence of the minor national fetish of anti-intellectualism. The growing awareness of American business of the international responsibilities of our government, plus the continuing influence of a strong Southern tradition, should serve to checkmate this development before it gains a stronger hold.

On economic matters Southerners in the Congress today have a reputation for conservatism which does not always stand up under scrutiny. There is a strong resistance to planned programs or blueprints which bear any of the earmarks of the doctrinaire liberal or "New Dealer," but

against this is an even stronger support for measures in the old Populist tradition of more money for the average man, or greater economic opportunity for the development of a resource or region. An important influence on thinking about labor legislation is the effect upon the various industrialization efforts. Voters with little money and still-restricted job opportunities will be the decisive influence in Southern elections for years yet to come.

Defense of the institution of slavery was the one non-geographic common bond of the Confederate States of America. Today the one non-geographic bond held by all the South in common, aside from the bitter heritage of the Confederacy, is acceptance of a system of segregation in basic social relationships between Negroes and whites. Segregation practices have varied through the years in various regions of the South, but the accepted and basic purpose has been to maintain a separate social relationship. Through the years since the Reconstruction period, vast progress was made toward establishing a peaceful and orderly relationship, built within the pattern of social segregation. Other artificial barriers fell away in the process by mutual consent. The best example of the progress being made was the fact that the Southern Negro's economic gains during the past few years have been proportionately even greater than those of the white man, and the virtual end of the day when economic exploitation based on race was common and accepted. Another proud milestone has been the virtual disappearance of lynching as a symptom of racial discord and conflict, by contrast with a period at the beginning of the century when it was accepted and stoutly defended as part of the normal way of life.

Southern political leaders at the national level secured acceptance of their ousting of Reconstruction governments at the price of a series of informal agreements to accept national developments which began with the election contest of Rutherford B. Hayes. For twenty-five years thereafter they fought successfully against a series of "force bills" designed to restore Federal control over state elections. During the

next forty years there were sporadic talk and occasional gestures toward national legislation affecting racial relationships in the South, but no serious efforts were made along the line.

The vast human and economic mobilization of World War II gave new energy to the forces which believed that the American Negro's problems of relationships with his fellow citizens could be solved by legislative prescription. Repeated efforts to pass such laws made resistance to the so-called civil rights legislation the chief effort of Southern legislators in the Congress. Many forces entered the fight, on one side or the other, with no real concern about the outcome, but in the hope of achieving their own camouflaged goals. After "civil rights" had become a spectacular issue in the 1948 presidential campaign, the major attempt to pass legislation in the field was made in the fight to modify the United States Senate rules in order to eliminate the filibuster. When this attempt met defeat, political realists accepted the fact that no major civil rights legislation could pass the Senate in the foreseeable future. Any future Federal action in the field would have to come through executive regulations or judicial edicts.

Administrative action in the civil rights field has become an accepted pattern. There is no likelihood that any future administration will fail to act to achieve such goals, after the demonstration of the effectiveness of executive regulation made by the Eisenhower administration.

The Supreme Court ruling against segregated schools struck at the heart of the effort to preserve a system of social segregation. It made a mere bugaboo of the threat of Fair Employment Practices legislation, previously regarded as the most fearful of the civil rights legislative plans. The ruling found only a tiny minority of Southern whites ready to accept it. Even among Negro leaders there is considerable confusion about an acceptable method of implementing the decision without bringing about educational setbacks for their children or stirring further racial discord.

All Southern states are in the process of resisting the im-

plementation of the decision through the full power of state governments. At this writing the Supreme Court has not yet ruled in regard to implementation, so that the various steps toward resistance which have been taken in the South are still on a tentative basis. Once there is a ruling as to implementation, it is safe to assume that the strength of resistance to the decision and order will vary largely with the proportion of Negro population in the various states. Barring some type of provocation which would make Federal enforcement of the ruling a strong issue in the rest of the country, a few Southern states, or at least sections of those where there is a very predominant percentage of Negro population, will not accept the ruling at any time in the foreseeable future. Some parts of the South will accept some form of an integrated system only if the present migration pattern continues to sharply reduce the Negro population.

Racial attitudes in the South have changed over the years, but the changes have not involved any general acceptance of the type of society that the idea of a non-segregated school invokes to the average Southerner. The fact that local hysteria failed to develop as an immediate reaction to the decision did not mean that attitudes were conditioned to acceptance of the new idea.

The great tragedy of the segregation decision has been the grave setback felt in the progress made toward good relations between the races. Mutual suspicion and distrust have become more prevalent again. Firebrand extremists on both sides of the issue have assumed positions of leadership in contrast to reasonable and rational men. Tensions have increased in some areas to where they can be likened to the smoldering brush ready to erupt into a raging forest fire of violence if any strong wind comes along to fan the flames.

The problem is one that concerns not just the South, but the whole country. In a larger sense it invites concern from the whole world, for new sectional discord here could destroy the effectiveness of American world leadership. A century

ago the nation approached a similar problem, and extremists prevailed in both the North and the South, with disastrous results from any viewpoint of the national welfare, by contrast with other solutions which could have been achieved. The problem today is by no means completely identical, but there is sufficient similarity to make temperate leadership a vital necessity. Imprudent interference from outside at this particular period could cause grave consequences at the national level for years yet to come.

The Supreme Court decision, no matter how it is or is not implemented, may eventually be recognized as a milestone in the final transition of a changing South. Economic developments are at last foretelling a period when the South and Southerners will have a completely equal share in the nation's wealth. The continuing concentration of mediums of communication and other institutions of education and entertainment which influence the national culture entirely above the regional level will be felt even more strongly in the South as economic growth enables and encourages the Southerner to become susceptible to these influences. Willingly or not, and knowingly or not, the South is finally entering the mainstream of American life.

After another generation it may become a major objective of students to discover and outline the traces of the Old South still discernible in our national life.